

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 30, 2018

Dr. Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Wilson,

As the Air Force fields F-35As in the coming months and F-16s become available for stationing elsewhere, we write to urge you to consider transitioning Fort Wayne Air National Guard Base's 122nd Fighter Wing to F-16s in fiscal year (FY) 2019. We believe the 122nd and Fort Wayne are ideally suited to transition to F-16s. This course of action would also yield timely and important benefits for the readiness of the Air Force's A-10 fleet, and we urge you to consider the merits of this proposal.

The 122nd Fighter Wing at Fort Wayne represents an optimal unit to transition to F-16s. The Indiana Air National Guard possesses deep experience with F-16s that would minimize or eliminate challenges normally associated with a unit transitioning between aircraft. In fact, the 122nd Fighter Wing flew F-16s for 18 years. As a result, the unit includes a large number of pilots and maintenance personnel who possess extensive knowledge regarding the F-16. Fort Wayne already has the infrastructure necessary for the F-16—minimizing any MILCON costs associated with a transition. F-16s at Fort Wayne would once again enjoy quick access to nearby airspace and air to ground ranges to maintain readiness. Fort Wayne boasts an absence of noise encroachment issues, and the Fort Wayne community would eagerly welcome the return of F-16s. In addition, transitioning F-16 Block 40s to Fort Wayne would align the Indiana Air National Guard with the South Dakota Air National Guard, creating two Air National Guard F-16 Block 40 units that could together support contingency and worldwide deployment requirements.

In addition to the attributes of the 122nd Fighter Wing that distinguish it as an optimal unit to transition to F-16s, doing so would also offer a creative solution to address the Air Force's short-term challenges related to A-10 wing replacement. As you know, the Air Force confronts a significant challenge in maintaining A-10 readiness due to an increasing number of A-10s being grounded for wings reaching the end of their service life. Replacement wings will likely not be available until fiscal year 2022, and the wings obtained from the boneyard will only offer limited flying hours.

The large majority of the A-10s at Fort Wayne have wings with a significant quantity of flight time left. Transitioning the A-10s at Fort Wayne to other A-10 units throughout the Air Force would stabilize those units and improve their ability to meet Combatant Commander requirements—at least until enhanced wing assemblies can be produced, delivered, and installed. This plan would help you accomplish your objectives for the A-10 fleet and would honor Congressional intent. Notably, Section 134 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (P.L. 114-328) explicitly authorizes you to transition the A-10 unit at Fort Wayne to an F-16 unit.

Furthermore, Slovakia recently decided to purchase F-16s from the United States. As you know, the Indiana National Guard has maintained a State Partnership Program with Slovakia since 1993. If the Air Force were to transition Fort Wayne to F-16s, it would enable the Indiana Air National Guard to expand training opportunities with Slovakia. This would deepen even further the partnership with Slovakia—a strategically-located NATO ally.

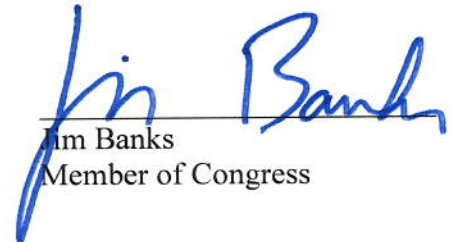
For these reasons, we respectfully encourage you to consider transitioning Fort Wayne Air National Guard Base's 122nd Fighter Wing to F-16s in FY 2019. We know you have many demands on your time, but we ask you to give this proposal serious consideration. After you do so, we are confident you will see its merits. We stand ready to work with you and support your efforts in any way we can.

Thank you for your distinguished service to our nation. Do not hesitate to contact us if we can be helpful.

Sincerely,



Todd Young
United States Senator



Jim Banks
Member of Congress